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AUTHOR Gray, Sara B.
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ABSTRACT

The declining rate of college-bound high school students and the growing high school dropout rate of minorities both nationally and locally are trends that need to be immediately addressed and reversed. In an effort to reverse the trends, children need academic encouragement in elementary and middle school, and need at an early age to envision going to college after high school as an expectation for themselves. The young students and their parents must be provided higher education information and experiences at transitional points in the students' school life when it is still possible for them to select appropriate and prescribed courses to maximize preparation for high school success, college admission, retention, and graduation. To meet this need, the Baltimore City (Maryland) Schools' Office of Guidance Services initiated an Early Guidance Model for middle/junior high school students. A committee of middle/junior high school counselors studied the issue and developed the model as a supportive network of experiences and information intended to raise student aspiration levels and improve student potential for a satisfying future. This report lists activities implemented by one school for College Awareness Day along with 17 college awareness strategies school counselors can use to help young students learn about college options. (NB)

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KEEPING THE OPTIONS OPEN: EARLY GUIDANCE AS THE KEY

ABSTRACT

Sara B. Gray, Coordinator
Office of Guidance Services
Baltimore City Public Schools
October, 1986

The declining college going rate and the growing high school dropout rate of minorities both nationally and locally are trends that need to be immediately addressed and reversed. In an effort to reverse the trends, children need academic encouragement in elementary and middle school, and need at an early age to envision going to college after high school as an expectation for themselves.

The young students and their parents must be provided higher education information and experiences at transitional points in their school life when it is still possible for them to select appropriate and prescribed courses to maximize preparation for high school success, college admission, retention, and graduation.

A plan that is a supportive network of experiences and information that will raise student aspiration levels and improve student potential for a satisfying future is proposed.

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KEEPING THE OPTIONS OPEN: EARLY GUIDANCE AS THE KEY

Prepared and presented by Sara B. Gray, Coordinator,
Office of Guidance Services, Baltimore City Public Schools,
at the COLLEGE BOARD - 1986 National Forum, held in New York
on October 26-28, 1986

Good morning, I am Sara Gray, Coordinator of the Baltimore City Public School's Office of Guidance Services, and in support of the topic, I am a Member of the College Board Advisory Panel on Minority Concerns; wife; and mother of two daughters, one a fourth generation college graduate and the youngest, an eleventh grader currently researching her college choice.

In response to the topic: Keeping the Options Open: Early Guidance as the Key, you will observe and hear a focus throughout my presentation on tradition, motivation, information, expectation, and reinforcement. Today's youth are living in a society that has rapidly changing expectations and as a result increased pressures have been placed upon them. The difficult period of adolescence is exacerbated by the easy availability of drugs and the emphasis on sexuality which pervades our media. Thus, many of this population are making the transition into adulthood with lowered self-concepts and low self-esteem which leads them most often into an escape by overindulging in drugs; becoming sexually active at earlier ages; and for an increasing desperate number, attempting to end their troubled lives.

Early in the lives of children, it is necessary that parents receive the appropriate training (parent skills), if not already in place to assist their children with positive inter-relationships between parent and child; help in developing a positive self-image and the ability to define their aspirations; help in sustaining their motivation and self-reliance, and help in providing the (children) with a sense of pride and direction for appropriate goal setting.

Significant school staff (teachers, counselors) and community (neighbors, churches, recreation centers and other agencies) must provide the resource to students and their parents to perpetuate all of the above mentioned and to assist school-age children in establishing their identity. Questions to be answered are Who Am I? What Are My values? Where Am I Headed? What Are My goals? What Can I Do intellectually?

Much work needs to be done repeatedly at the elementary level and certainly no later than the middle school level to hopefully produce a population of well-informed consumers capable and interested in pursuing the various options available to them and leading to their success in the world of work. It is expected that one very important option may well be the pursuit of a college education. Whether a student goes on to pursue a college education is largely determined in elementary and/or middle/junior high school. The older students who are unaware of the advantages of college are more likely to avoid choosing the more demanding courses required for college admission and preparation. And without proper financial guidance are not aware of student aid programs and most likely will dismiss the idea of going to college because of cost. In communities where the tradition to attend college has been established by family and friends, it remains necessary to reinforce the expectation. In settings where tradition is not the rule, a concentrated program of Early Guidance must be developed and orchestrated. Throughout the model to be shared this morning are the constants of expectation, motivation, information sharing, and reinforcement.

Three years ago in the Baltimore City Schools' Guidance Services Office, we initiated an Early Guidance Model for middle/junior high school students. The college bound data had revealed an annual decline in the numbers applying to and actually attending postsecondary institutions. As a practicing school counselor it had been my strong belief that schools waited much too late (often grade 11) in the student's academic life to provide the necessary college information. A student not highly motivated by family, friends, or other role models was observed to be extremely indecisive, not interested, or not academically able to pursue the college option.

A committee of middle/junior high school counselors was formed to study the issue and to develop an implementable model. Of course, there were no funds available and the committee was charged to be as creative as possible. Curriculum guides were developed on the topic of college counseling for grades 6-9 and career awareness and included in the Competency Based Guidance Management Plan.

A College Awareness Day for middle/junior high school students was announced systemwide and interested schools developed strategies to promote the idea. This activity is annually observed during the month of October, so as to coincide with the NACAC College Fair scheduled for juniors and seniors. On one or two college fair dates, certain middle school counselors carried groups of students to the fair site. This was received with mixed reactions and thus this practice was not encouraged.

In one specific school, the following activities were implemented for College Awareness Day:

1. Counselors requested the school faculty to spend approximately 10 minutes at the beginning of each period sharing something about their college and/or college experience with their students.
2. The counselor inquired of each faculty member the name of his/her college/university attended and engaged the school's art instructor to make a banner for each staff person in his/her school colors.
3. The faculty was then asked to display the banner in a prominent place in each classroom. Posters highlighting College Awareness Day were displayed throughout the school prior to the observed date.

4. Staff members were asked to wear anything with their college/university name on it or to display any memorabilia available.
5. At the last period of the day, students were given a quiz based on the College Awareness Day information and events of the activity shared. Completed quizzes were sent to the Guidance office for evaluation of the activity.
6. Counselors sent letters home to parents and/or friends announcing College Awareness Day and asked their support and made them aware of the planning.
7. Each morning for 7 days prior to Oct. 23rd, the counselor read over the school intercom information about one Maryland college. Students were given one minute to guess the name of the college and call in over the intercom. If there was a winning homeroom, the class was announced along with the name of the mystery college. If not, only the name of the college was announced.

For this school year, one middle school has scheduled a college admissions assembly for students and parents at the school site. Immediately following the assembly, buses will take the parents to one of the local community colleges for a financial aid workshop and a luncheon hosted by the college. Local television coverage is anticipated to help promote College Awareness Day in Baltimore City.

Additional strategies recommended and perceived to be responsive to the issue include:

1. Securing bookmarks, book covers from the more well endowed colleges/universities for middle school distribution.
2. Inviting former (BCPS graduates) now 1st and 2nd year college students to return to their middle/junior high schools to speak to small groups of students concerning the college experience.
3. Developing pen pal relationships between mdl/jr. hgh. student and the college student recruiters to sustain and reinforce the interest level.
4. Involving alumni organizations, fraternities, sororities, recent retirees in mentoring programs and/or tutorial programs.
5. Training students as peer counselors to provide college resource information to their peers.
6. Providing (local) college campus visits when school is in session for the obvious reasons.
7. Inviting middle school students and their parents on campus for cost-free cultural, academic, athletic events.
8. Providing middle school students with an opportunity for a one-to-two week overnight campus experience in a structured program to be developed cooperatively by school counselors and college representatives.

9. Inviting parents of middle school youth to participate in Financial Aid Parent Night programs when scheduled.
10. Sharing old college catalogs and unused applications received from senior high schools and colleges (School Partnerships).
11. Participating in the use of computerized Guidance information systems and/or microfiche. All Baltimore City middle schools have access to microfiched information to help students locate information about colleges - majors and career oriented programs offered at two and four-year institutions.
12. Providing early financial planning workshops for parents.
13. Informing parents, students early of the Maryland State Department of Education's high school graduation requirements.
14. Informing students/parents of independent high school opportunities for the academically talented. A Better Chance (ABC) Boston, MA.
15. Involving federally funded Talent Search programs, Upward Bound in the provision of resource to the middle schools - - a re-focusing of support.
16. Developing a college library for middle school consumers. Write for free materials, develop a bibliography of recommended reading.
17. Investigating the possibility of establishing incentive programs such as in New York - the guarantee of college educations made to the 6th graders by the widely acclaimed benefactor and the School Aid and Job Plan in Boston (\$6 million tuition and guaranteed employment).

The school counselor is encouraged to facilitate by interacting with parents, faculty and community most of the above strategies and to creatively develop other ideas not captured in this paper. He/She is encouraged to become change agents and to acknowledge their commitment to students and to expect that all students are capable of achieving success; to inform and assume nothing; to continuously motivate students to achieve their goals and to do their very best; and to constantly reinforce and support student aspirations in an effort to assure that students are capable of making more defined and earlier decisions in pursuit of their options.

Thank you.